

"We had one very close call while digging a communicating trench between our own and No. 4's. A fair sized shell struck the edge of the trench fairly while it was filled with our men at only a yard distance from each other. Had it burst in the air instead of on the ground it would probably have bagged a dozen or more, but as it was it killed only one and slightly wounded another. I was about twenty feet away but hearing the whistle in the air I dropped to my knees, but I could feel the suction and concussion of the air when the explosion came. Afterwards I was told by the man nearest to the place that half a minute before I had been standing on the exact spot where the shell struck, and if my subconscious intuition continues to serve me as well in future I shall come home scatheless.

"We are now back in billets for a few days' rest, and one realizes that there has been a strain, from the reaction which leaves us all a little irritable and nervous, as you may judge from this scrawl.

"It will be years before the section now being fought over regains a normal look, but where we are within six miles of the line, there are no signs of war, the fields are under crop, the houses in good repair, and the people living apparently a quiet, peaceful life. The change in coming from the trenches seems odd but very pleasant."

Mr. E. L. YEO, of the London, Eng., staff, writes from "Somewhere in France" under date of 3rd June, 1915, as follows:

"Since last writing our battalion has been taking an active part in the British advance (promised as you may perhaps remember by Lord Kitchener some months ago). This advance is a steady one, but obviously cannot be rapid as the obstacles to be overcome are numerous. For instance, the plain here is dotted with villages and isolated farm houses; each of these has been transformed by the tireless German into (in the case of the farm house) a miniature fortress and (in the case of villages) a collection of small forts which, when defended by innumerable machine guns prove 'tough nuts' only to be broken down by a steady bombardment of our own artillery. As you no doubt already know, high explosive is used in this connection, shrapnel being used when the inmates of the forts mentioned are more or less exposed to fire, their defences having been partially destroyed by high explosive. The system often used by us in capturing trenches is also interesting. Following a heavy bombardment of a portion of the enemy's line a bayonet charge is made on same. A footing is thus made and a bombing party then comes into action. The bombing party consists of a number of men armed with hand bombs who are immediately preceded by others with fixed bayonets. Bombs are hurled over the heads of the latter people at the enemy, the demoralized survivors of which are summarily dealt with by the bayonet men. At the time of writing our machine gun teams are occupying trenches situated south of our last position. The enemy are about one thousand yards distant, and consequently things are very quiet indeed, occasional shells being our only trouble. The weather lately, and which still continues, is brilliant."

Mr. A. C. CATON, of the London, Eng., staff, writes a further letter dated Belgium, 6th June, 1915, as follows: